

Office of the County Commission

**Escambia County, Alabama**

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

**PROCLAMATION**

WHEREAS, last year one in every four of the 940,872 Alabamians living in poverty experienced legal problems, with the majority of these civil problems being consumer issues (creditor harassment, utility non-payment, bankruptcy issues), health issues (Medicaid, government insurance, nursing home), family law issues (divorce, child support/custody, abuse), employment issues (unemployment benefits, pension, lost job), and housing issues (unsatisfactory repairs, foreclosure, eviction, poor living conditions); and

WHEREAS, 22% of the citizens in Escambia County live in poverty; and

WHEREAS each year the low-income citizens of Escambia County lack access to legal assistance for their legal problems that are often critical to their safety and independence, forcing them to resolve complex legal problems on their own; and

WHEREAS, the need for legal aid in Alabama is dire, since unlike in the criminal defense system, funding for low-income Alabamians who need civil legal assistance has not yet been met, with the consequences being a lack of access to justice which is devastating for the poor and which weakens our democratic society as a whole; and

WHEREAS, there are fewer than 55 paid legal aid lawyers to serve the more than 422,119 low-income households in the State of Alabama; and

WHEREAS, although 38% of the members of the Escambia County legal community donated their time and talents in free legal services each year, a huge unmet need for legal assistance remains for the disadvantaged in our area; and

WHEREAS, sponsored by the Alabama State Bar and its Pro Bono Celebration Task Force, with support from local bar associations statewide, Pro Bono Week 2011, from October 23rd to 29th, 2011, will educate the public about the extensive work Alabama lawyers are doing donating their time to improve the lives of vulnerable members of our community, and will encourage more individuals in the legal community to get involved in pro bono work and financially support the legal aid system; and

WHEREAS, Pro Bono Week 2011 will feature legal aid clinics throughout the State, assisting Alabamians who greatly need legal assistance but cannot afford to pay for that help, and will also feature service projects throughout the State of Alabama helping lawyers and law students make volunteer connections with legal aid organizations serving Alabamians;

NOW, THEREFORE, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, does hereby proclaim October 23-39, 2011 to be PRO BONO WEEK, and urge all Escambia County residents to recognize the contributions of our legal community helping those most in need.

DATED this the 26<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2011.

  
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TONY SANKS, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR